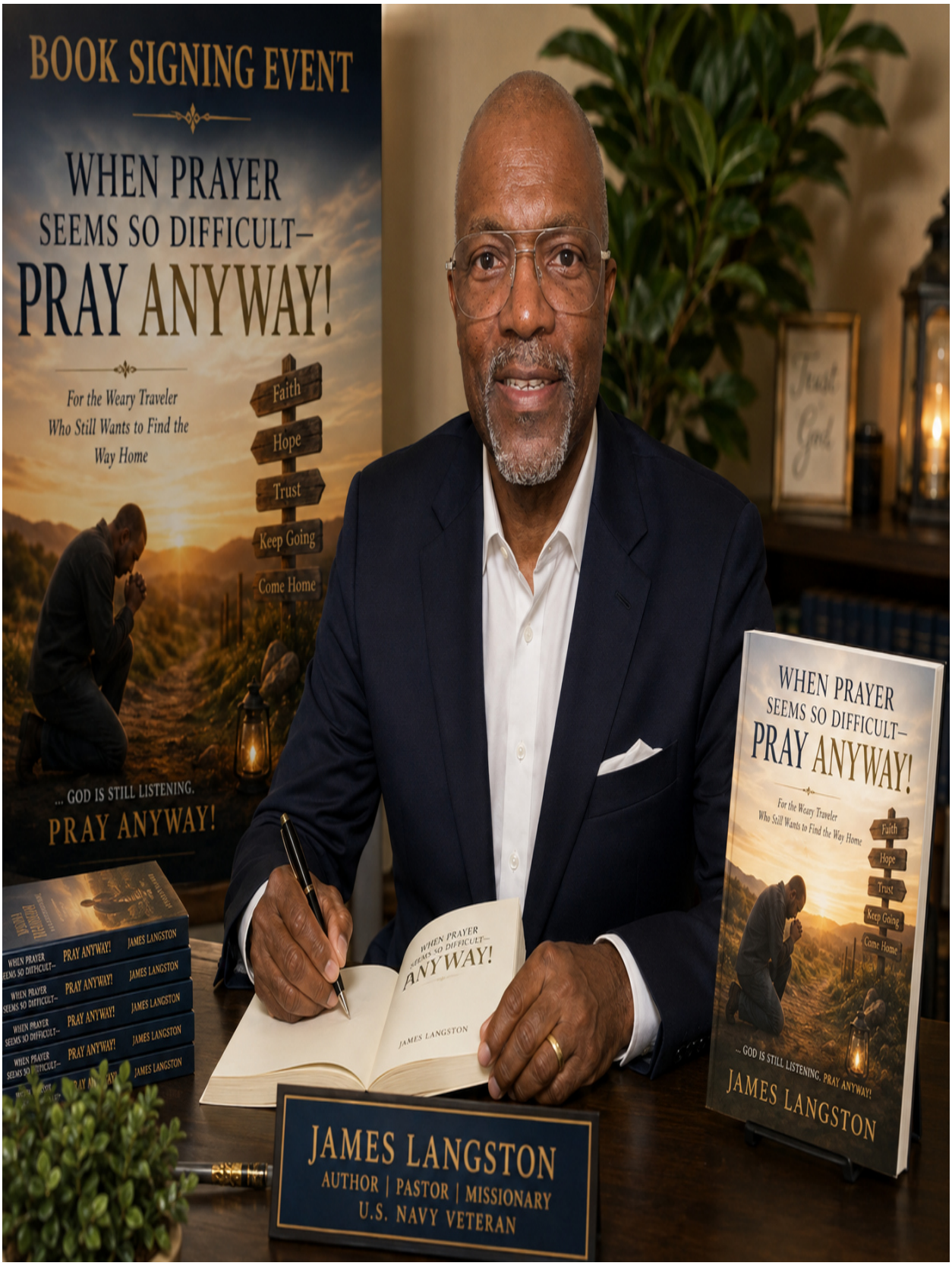

www.thewilltosucceed.homestead.com

WHEN PRAYER SEEMS SO DIFFICULT

‘PRAY ANYWAY’

. . . God is Still Listening. Pray Anyway! . . .

==========

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Dedication . . . *Foreword . . .* *Preface . . .* *Acknowledgements . . .*

A Prayer Before We Begin . . . *Why This Book . . .* *At the Old Landmark . . .*

PART I — WHEN PRAYER BECOMES A STRUGGLE

"Why Does Prayer Seem So Difficult?" **1**

"When Heaven Seems Silent" **3**

PART II — JESUS TEACHES US TO PRAY

"The Pattern Behind the Prayer" **5**

PART III — WHAT STANDS IN OUR WAY?

"What's Blocking My Prayer?" **7**

": When God's Answer is Different" **9**

PART IV — KEEP PRAYING

"Growing Stronger One Prayer At A Time" **11**

"Pray Anyway" **12**

LATE EVEING PRAYER (END MATTER)

"Thirty Promises for Those Who Pray"

"Conversations With the Father"

"Meet Me Here" "A Note to the Person Helping Someone Else"

"Scripture Index"

"Appendix G: Quick Reference Guide"

"About the Author"

"One Final Invitation"

Dedication

"For the One Who Almost Stopped Praying"

by James Langston | Senior pastor |Missionary | Husband | Father | Grandfather | Visionary | Retired Navy Veteran

THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED TO YOU.

The one who prayed...

and waited.

The one who believed...

and wondered.

The one who asked God for an answer...

and struggled when the answer wasn't what you hoped.

The one who sat quietly because you couldn't find the words.

The one who wondered whether God was listening.

The one who became tired of waiting.

The one who stumbled.

The one who wandered.

The one who still loved God...

but didn't always know how to talk to Him.

This book is for you.

Not because I have all the answers.

I don't.

Not because I've discovered some secret formula that makes prayer easy.

There isn't one.

And certainly not because I've mastered prayer.

I haven't.

I simply wanted you to know something before we began:

You aren't the only one who has found prayer difficult.

And difficulty doesn't mean the conversation has to end.

So if you're holding this book with questions...

bring them.

Foreword

"by Cecilia Langston"

Wife | Mother | Grandmother | Missionary | Friend to the Friendless | Visionary | Counselor | Helpmate to My Husband

I HAVE BEEN ASKED TO write these words because, for over forty-seven years, I have had a front-row seat to the life and ministry of my husband, James Langston.

I've often thought how people only see the "public" side of a pastor—the sermons, the leadership, the counseling, the steady hand at the helm. But life in ministry is rarely as polished as a Sunday morning service.

I have watched my Mahal [Love]—that's what I call him—in the quiet, messy, and often painful moments that happen behind the scenes.

I have seen him sit with people who have lost everything and have nothing left to say to God.

I have seen him walk with the grieving, the disillusioned, and the exhausted.

I have watched him hold space for people whose faith was hanging by a thread. And I have watched him, more times than I can count, carry his own heavy burdens into his study, only to come out after kneeling before the Father until his own heart was steady again.

I know the man behind these pages.

I know that when he talks about prayer being difficult, it isn't a theory he developed from a textbook.

It is a reality he has lived.

I have watched him pray when the answers didn't come.

I have seen him wrestle with silence, yet I have never seen him turn away from the throne.

He is not a man who has "arrived" or who has neatly solved the mystery of suffering. He is, like you, a traveler who has simply decided that no matter how difficult the road becomes, he will not stop walking toward the Father.

If you are holding this book, it may be because you are weary.

Maybe you've reached a point where the words won't come, or where the words feel like they're hitting the ceiling.

Preface

Pull up a Chair

"by James Langston"

Senior pastor |Missionary | Husband | Father | Grandfather | Visionary | Retired Navy Veteran

IF YOU'VE MADE IT THIS FAR, then someone has already welcomed you to the conversation.

So...

pull up a chair.

There's room.

You don't need to tell me why you're here.

Maybe prayer has become difficult.

Maybe it hasn't.

Perhaps your relationship with God is stronger today than it has been in years, and you simply want to grow.

Perhaps someone placed this book in your hands.

Maybe the title caught your attention because it described something you've never been able to put into words.

Or perhaps you're tired.

Just tired.

Whatever brought you here...

welcome.

I'm glad you came.

This isn't going to be a classroom.

I'm not standing behind a lectern, and you aren't sitting at a desk taking notes while I explain everything I've learned about prayer.

There will be Scripture. Plenty of it.

There will be instruction where instruction is needed.

There will be stories.

Questions.

Some things to think about.

Acknowledgements

No One Travels Alone

"by James Langston"

Senior pastor |Missionary | Husband | Father | Grandfather | Visionary | Retired Navy Veteran

THERE ARE SOME JOURNEYS we may begin by ourselves.

Very few worth taking are completed that way.

As I look back over the years that eventually gave birth to *When Prayer Seems So Difficult—Pray Anyway*, I realize how many people have walked some portion of the road with me.

Some stayed for years.

Others appeared for only a season.

A few may never have realized how much they taught me.

But each, in some way, left footprints.

And for that, I am grateful.

First, to the Father

Before anyone else, I acknowledge God.

Not as a formality.

Not because this is a Christian book and that's what Christian authors are expected to say.

But because there would be no story to tell without Him.

He has heard my prayers.

Answered some exactly as I hoped.

Answered others differently.

Allowed me to wait.

Corrected me.

Carried me.

Forgiven me.

Taught me.

And sometimes remained quiet long enough for me to learn that His silence did not mean His absence.

After all these years, I am still learning.

A Prayer Before We Begin

"Father, Here We Are"

FATHER, HERE WE ARE

Father...

Here we are.

Before another page is turned...

before another thought is considered...

before we talk about prayer...

we want to pray.

Not because we have the right words.

Not because we know exactly what this journey will uncover.

Not because everyone holding this book feels strong, confident, or even certain about why they are here.

We simply come.

Just as we are.

Some of us come with strong faith.

Some with questions.

Some with gratitude.

Some with disappointment.

Some carrying burdens nobody else knows about.

Some have talked with You already today.

Others may be speaking to You for the first time in a very long while.

And perhaps someone holding this book isn't even sure what they believe anymore.

Father...

meet us here.

You already know us.

You know the things we say aloud...

and the things we don't.

You know the prayers we've prayed.

The answers we've received.

Why This Book?

"Because Sometimes Prayer Becomes Difficult"

PRAYER SHOULD BE SIMPLE.

At least that's what we sometimes think.

Talk to God.

Believe.

Trust.

Wait.

Amen.

But if you've lived very long...

you probably know it isn't always that simple.

There are days when prayer comes easily.

The words flow.

Faith feels strong.

God seems near.

You know what you want to say, and perhaps you could stay there talking with Him for hours.

And then...

there are other days.

Days when you sit down to pray and nothing comes.

Days when you've prayed about the same thing so many times that you wonder whether saying it again makes any difference.

Days when you've believed...

and waited...

and waited some more.

Days when Heaven seems quiet.

Days when the answer isn't what you expected.

Days when disappointment enters the conversation.

And sometimes...

days when you don't particularly feel like praying at all.

That's why this book exists.

At the Old Landmark

"Before We Take the First Step"

THERE ARE PLACES ALONG A familiar road that tell you where you are.

An old tree.

A church steeple.

A bridge.

A bend in the road.

Something you've passed so many times that you hardly notice it anymore.

But when you've been away for a while...

you recognize it immediately.

"I know this place."

And suddenly, you know where you are.

You know which way is home.

That's a landmark.

Before we begin this journey together, I'd like us to establish one.

Something we can return to when the road becomes unfamiliar.

When questions become difficult.

When feelings become confusing.

When the clouds roll in and we aren't quite sure which direction we're traveling.

Our landmark is wonderfully simple:

The Father is still there.

That's where we'll begin.

And whenever necessary...

that's where we'll return.

You Don't Have to Pack Much

Some journeys require careful preparation.

This one doesn't.

You don't need a theology degree.

You don't need years of Bible study.

You don't need an impressive prayer vocabulary.

CHAPTER ONE

'Why Does Prayer Seem So Difficult?'

The Question Every Believer Eventually Asks

THERE COMES A MOMENT IN NEARLY every Believer's life when prayer changes.

It is no longer the simple conversation it once was.

The words do not come as easily.

The confidence that once filled our hearts begins to fade.

Heaven feels strangely quiet.

Somewhere between our "Amen" and God's answer, discouragement begins to whisper.

Questions we never imagined asking suddenly become deeply personal.

"Is God listening?"

"Am I praying the wrong way?"

"Why does everyone else seem to receive answers while mine remain unanswered?"

"Have I done something wrong?"

If those questions sound familiar...

welcome.

Not because I rejoice that you're hurting.

But because you no longer have to walk this road believing you're the only one who has ever struggled.

You aren't.

You are walking a road traveled by some of God's dearest servants.

Abraham waited.

Hannah wept.

David cried out.

Job questioned.

Paul pleaded.

Even our Lord prayed through agony in Gethsemane.

The struggle did not mean they had lost their faith.

It often meant their faith was being deepened.

CHAPTER THREE

'When Heaven Seems Silent'

Silence is NOT Abandonment

WHEN WE FINISHED OUR LAST conversation, we discovered a truth that changes the way we pray.

Your Father is listening.

Not occasionally.

Not when you have the right words.

Not only when your faith feels strong.

He is listening because you are His child.

That truth is as certain today as it has ever been.

But perhaps another question has quietly found its way into your heart.

"If my Father hears me...why does heaven seem so silent?"

Maybe you've prayed the same prayer so many times that you no longer count.

You've prayed for healing.

For your marriage.

For a prodigal son or daughter.

For direction.

For a door to open.

For the burden to lift.

For the tears to stop.

For God to simply say...something.

Anything.

Yet the heavens seem quiet.

You continue reading your Bible.

You continue attending church.

You continue believing God's promises.

But if you're honest, there are moments when the silence feels almost deafening.

Most Believers have experienced that season.

Few are willing to admit it.

CHAPTER FIVE

'The Pattern Behind the Prayer'

Walking with Jesus through the Lord's Prayer.

THERE ARE SOME JOURNEYS THAT CAN only be understood one step at a time. This is one of them.

When Jesus answered the disciples' request,

"Lord, teach us to pray,"

He didn't simply give them words to repeat.

He invited them to walk with Him.

That invitation continues today.

Perhaps you've prayed the Lord's Prayer hundreds of times.

Perhaps you've memorized it since childhood.

Perhaps you've heard it spoken in churches, around dinner tables, at weddings, funerals, and quiet hospital rooms.

Its words are familiar.

So familiar, in fact, that we sometimes hurry past them without noticing the treasure they contain.

I'd like to ask you to do something different.

Walk slowly.

Not because the prayer is difficult to understand.

But because every step reveals something beautiful about the Father's heart.

Imagine for a moment that you're walking beside Jesus.

The crowds have grown quiet.

The day's demands have faded into the background.

Only you...

the Master...

and the Father remain.

Jesus smiles and says,

"Come with Me."

Not,

CHAPTER SEVEN

'What's Standing in the Way?'

Not Condemnation…

THERE ARE MOMENTS ON EVERY JOURNEY when the road suddenly becomes more difficult.

Not because the destination has changed.

Not because the Guide has left us.

But because something has found its way onto the path.

Perhaps you've experienced that while walking through a forest.

The trail was clear.

Then, after a storm, fallen branches covered the way.

The path still existed.

You simply couldn't walk it as easily as before.

Prayer can feel that way.

There are seasons when conversation with the Father flows as naturally as breathing.

Then there are other seasons when something feels...different.

The words don't come as easily.

Joy seems harder to find.

Peace feels just out of reach.

Our first thought is often,

"Has God moved away from me?"

The answer is almost always the same.

No.

The Father has not moved.

Perhaps something has simply settled onto the path between where you are and where He has been inviting you all along.

That is what this chapter is about.

Not exposing your failures.

Not making you feel guilty.

Not handing you another burden to carry.

CHAPTER NINE

'When God's Answer Isn't What I Expected'

Yes. No. Wait. Something Better.

Learning to Trust Every Answer.

BEFORE WE GO ANY FARTHER...

come sit with me for a while.

No lesson yet.

No explanation.

No attempt to make everything sound better than it feels.

Just sit.

Because perhaps you prayed.

Really prayed.

You believed.

You waited.

You asked others to pray with you.

You searched Scripture.

You tried to trust.

And then the answer came.

It wasn't what you expected.

Maybe it wasn't even close.

And now you're sitting there wondering:

"What do I do with this?"

I know.

This chapter isn't written from the comfortable side of prayer.

It's written for the person who prayed sincerely...

and still hurt afterward.

Perhaps God said yes.

Perhaps He said no.

Perhaps He said wait.

Or perhaps the answer came in a form you never imagined.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

'Growing Stronger One Prayer at a Time'

Prayer is a Relationship that Grows

"Not Perfected"

SOMETHING HAS BEEN HAPPENING.

You may not have noticed it.

In fact, perhaps we shouldn't point it out too quickly.

But we've been walking together long enough that I think you're ready to see it.

You're growing.

Not because you know everything about prayer.

You don't.

Neither do we.

Not because prayer has suddenly become easy.

There will still be difficult days.

Not because every question has been answered.

Some haven't.

And certainly not because every prayer has turned out the way you hoped.

You already know better than that.

But still...

something has changed.

Think Back for a Moment

Remember the person who wondered why prayer seemed so difficult?

The person who wasn't always sure God was listening?

The person who struggled when heaven seemed silent?

The person learning to trust without understanding?

The person who sometimes didn't know what to say?

That person is still you.

But you're not quite the same traveler anymore.

Somewhere along the road...

you prayed.

CHAPTER TWELVE

'Pray Anyway'

"The Conversation Doesn't End Here"

THERE COMES A TIME WHEN every conversation like this has to change.

Not end.

Change.

We've spent a lot of time together.

We've talked about difficult prayers. Silent heavens. Waiting. Answers we didn't understand. Words we couldn't find. Days when faith felt strong, and others when simply whispering Father took about all the strength we had.

We've laughed a little. Cried some. Sat beside the road. Waited for the clouds to clear. And more than once, we've simply looked toward the Father and admitted:

"I don't know."

That's been all right.

But something is different now.

You are.

Not finished. Not perfected. Not suddenly immune to difficult days.

Just...different.

When we began, perhaps you were trying to learn how to pray.
How to find the right words. How to keep going when heaven seemed silent. How to wait. How to understand answers you didn't expect. How to pray when you didn't know what to say.

Those things mattered. They still do.

But somewhere along the road, prayer stopped being merely something you were trying to understand and became somewhere you knew to go.

To the Father.

When afraid.

To the Father.

When confused.

To the Father.

When grateful.

Thirty Promises for Those Who Pray

"Truths to Carry With You"

BEFORE YOU MOVE ON, THERE are a few things worth taking with you.

Not our promises.

His.

Throughout this journey, we've talked about feelings.

Feelings matter.

We've talked about experiences.

Experiences matter too.

But neither feelings nor experiences are strong enough to carry the full weight of our faith.

There will be mornings when you feel close to God.

There may be others when you don't.

There will be prayers that seem to receive answers quickly.

Others may leave you waiting much longer than you expected.

Circumstances change.

Emotions change.

People change.

Seasons change.

But the Word of God remains.

So what follows isn't another chapter.

We're finished with those.

Smile.

Think of these pages as something you can keep nearby.

Thirty promises.

Thirty reminders.

Thirty places to return when life becomes noisy and you need something firmer than how you happen to feel that day.

You don't need to read them all at once.

You don't need to memorize them before moving forward.

Conversations With the Father

"When You Need a Place to Begin"

PERHAPS THERE WILL STILL BE DAYS when you open your mouth to pray... and nothing comes.

That's all right.

We've been there before.

The pages that follow are not prayers you must memorize.

They aren't formulas.

They aren't special words that somehow make God listen more closely.

Think of them simply as places to begin.

Find where you are.

Read the Scripture.

Use the opening words if they help.

Then...

put the book down.

Talk to your Father.

Your words.

Your heart.

Your conversation.

And if you begin here but end somewhere completely different?

Good.

That's what conversations do.

When I'm Afraid

Scripture:

"What time I am afraid, I will trust in Thee."

— Psalms 56:3

Begin here:

Father, I'm afraid.

Tell Him what frightens you.

Not what you think should frighten you.

Meet Me Here

"When You Need to Find Your Way Back"

YOU DON'T HAVE TO REREAD the entire journey every time life becomes difficult.

Sometimes you simply need to know where to meet us.

Find what you're feeling.

Go there.

And remember...

the destination isn't the page. It's the Father.

If You're Thinking...	**Meet Me Here...**
"Prayer shouldn't be this difficult."	Chapter 1 — Why Does Prayer Seem So Difficult?
"Does God really hear me?"	Chapter 2 — Does God Really Hear Me?
"Heaven seems silent."	Chapter 3 — When Heaven Seems Silent
"I need to be honest with God."	Chapter 6 — Praying From the Heart: Honesty
"I'm trying too hard to pray correctly."	Chapter 6 — Simplicity: Prayer Without the Performance
"I'm afraid."	Conversations With the Father — When I'm Afraid
"I'm discouraged."	Conversations With the Father — When I'm Discouraged

A Note to the Person Helping Someone Else

"Care Enough to Walk Beside Them"

PERHAPS YOU AREN'T THE WEARY TRAVELER.

Perhaps you're the one who noticed them.

A friend.

A spouse.

A parent.

A pastor.

A coworker.

A neighbor.

Or simply someone who happened to be there when another person finally admitted:

"I'm struggling."

Thank you for noticing.

But before you try to help...

remember something we've learned along this journey:

Concern notices.

Care turns around.

Care doesn't always arrive carrying an answer.

Sometimes it arrives carrying a chair.

Sit down.

Listen.

Let them talk.

Don't rush to fill every silence.

Don't assume that because you've experienced something similar, you know exactly how they feel.

You don't.

Their road is theirs.

So listen.

Don't Overdrive Them

Scripture Index

"Find What You Need for the Road"

YOU DON'T HAVE TO REMEMBER where every Scripture appeared.

You don't even have to remember the chapter.

Sometimes you simply know what you need.

Faith.

Peace.

Courage.

Forgiveness.

Direction.

Hope.

So use these pages that way.

Find where you are.

Then find somewhere in God's Word to stand.

The page numbers below point you toward places in this book where these Scriptures appear or where their truths become especially important.

And remember...

don't merely read the reference.

Open the Bible.

Stay there awhile if you need to.

The road can wait.

• WHEN YOU NEED FAITH AND TRUST •

Proverbs 3:5–6

Trust the Lord when you cannot understand the road — pp. 416, 425

Isaiah 55:8

God's thoughts and ways are higher than ours — p. 95

Romans 8:28

Trusting God's work even when circumstances are difficult — pp. 99, 415

2 Corinthians 12:9

God's grace is sufficient in weakness — pp. 417, 426

About the Author

"by James Langston"

Senior pastor |Missionary | Husband | Father | Grandfather | Visionary | Retired Navy Veteran

IF YOU'VE REACHED THIS PAGE, then we've traveled quite a piece together.

So perhaps a formal introduction now would be a little strange.

We've already sat beside a few roads together.

We've waited.

Asked questions.

Talked about disappointment.

Remembered some things.

Laughed occasionally.

And somewhere along the journey, perhaps we learned that neither of us has to have every answer in order to keep walking with the Father.

Still, you may be wondering something about the person whose voice has accompanied you through these pages.

My name is James Langston.

I'm a husband, father, grandfather, pastor, missionary, author, and retired United States Navy veteran.

But before all of those things...

I'm a man who needs the Father.

That may be the most important qualification I can give you for writing this book.

A Long Road With God

My journey with the Lord began as a young boy and took a decisive turn when I accepted Jesus Christ as my Savior in 1973, at fourteen years old.

I certainly didn't understand then where the road would lead.

Few fourteen-year-olds do.

Three years later, in 1976, I entered the United States Navy. What followed was a twenty-seven-year military career that took me around the world and eventually brought retirement in 2003.

One Final Invitation

"Come Home"

BEFORE WE PART, THERE IS ONE final thing I need to ask you.

Not about how well you pray.

Not about how much you've learned.

Not about whether you've enjoyed this journey.

Something much more important.

Do you know Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior?

Throughout these pages, we've talked about coming to the Father.

We've talked about His love.

His grace.

His mercy.

His faithfulness.

We've talked about prayer as relationship.

But relationship with God isn't something we earn by learning how to pray.

It isn't earned by going to church.

By doing good things.

By becoming religious.

By helping people.

Or even by reading a book about prayer from beginning to end.

Jesus said:

"I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me."

— John 14:6

There is the invitation.

And there is the way home.

Jesus Christ.

Why Do I Need Him?

The Bible tells us plainly:

"For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God."

— Romans 3:23